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**Background
Information**
from
**Congressman
Joe Pitts**



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H.R. 1943, Amish Labor Bill

SUMMARY OF H.R. 1943

H.R. 1943 would allow Amish youth to continue to do certain jobs in businesses where machinery is used to process wood products. However, the bill contains several important provisions to ensure the safety of Amish youth, including a requirement to stay a safe distance away from dangerous equipment. The individual must be:

- ✓ between the ages of 14 and 18;
- ✓ a member of a religious sect or division whose established teachings do not permit formal classroom education beyond the eighth grade;
- ✓ supervised by an adult relative or an adult who is a member of the same religious sect or division;
- ✓ not allowed to operate or assist in the operation of power-driven woodworking machines, and must wear proper protective equipment.

COMMITTEE ACTION ON H.R. 1943 – 10/8

The House Committee on Education and the Workforce Subcommittee on Workforce Protections has scheduled a hearing for Wednesday, October 8th to consider H.R. 1943, the Amish Labor Bill introduced by Congressman Joe Pitts (R, PA-16).

The hearing will take place on Wednesday, October 8, 2003 at 10:00 A.M. in Room 2175 of the Rayburn House Office Building.

The hearing can be viewed live on the web at:

<http://edworkforce.house.gov/committee/webcast.htm>

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THE AMISH

The Amish are a religious group who live in settlements in at least thirty-two states and Ontario, Canada. The oldest group of Old Order Amish, about 16-18,000 people, live in and around Lancaster County, Pennsylvania.

The Amish have their roots in the Mennonite community. Both were part of the early Anabaptist movement in Europe, which coincided with the Reformation. The Anabaptists believed that only adults who had confessed their faith should be baptized, and that they should remain separate from the larger society.

Many early Anabaptists were put to death as heretics by both Catholics and Protestants. Many others fled to the mountains of Switzerland and southern Germany, starting the Amish tradition of farming and holding worship services in homes rather than churches.

In 1536, a young Catholic priest from Holland named Menno Simons joined the Anabaptist movement. His writings and leadership united many of the Anabaptist groups, who were nicknamed "Mennonites."

In 1693, a Swiss bishop named Jacob Amman broke from the Mennonite church. His followers were called the "Amish." Amish and Mennonite churches differ in matters of dress, technology, language, form of worship, and interpretation of the Bible; but they continue to share the same core beliefs concerning baptism, non-resistance, and basic biblical doctrines.

The Amish and Mennonites both settled in Pennsylvania as part of William Penn's "holy experiment" of religious tolerance. The first sizable group of Amish arrived in Lancaster County in the 1720's and 1730's.

SOURCES=: <http://www.800padutch.com/amish.shtml>.

A WAY OF LIFE ENDANGERED

The *Daily Labor Report* explains: "After completing their formal classroom training at age 14 or 15, Amish boys typically receive training in farming or carpentry from their fathers." The declining opportunity to farm (in part, because of increased land values and development) has led the Amish to have their children apprentice doing custodial and clerical jobs in wood-working facilities. Amish communities do not approve of minors operating potentially dangerous equipment.

The Department of Labor has fined Amish businessmen who employ youth under the age 18 in businesses where machinery is used to process wood products. The Amish view this as a direct threat to their religious beliefs on rearing their children, since they wish to have their youth work in vocational settings after completion of Amish school, which is equal to eighth grade.

The Amish of Pennsylvania (and of other states) resist requirements of law that would alter their traditional way of life. Many Amish avoid modern conveniences and have rejected compulsory school attendance beyond the eighth grade.

Amish youth are already exempt from state laws making school attendance mandatory when they have finished eighth grade and are 14 years old, and they are permitted to work more hours than would normally be the case and to work during traditional school hours.

Department of Labor (DOL) has prohibited young persons under 18 years of age from working in or around woodworking facilities. However, minors working in agriculture are exempt from child labor laws altogether.

LEGISLATIVE HISTORY

105th Congress

Rep. Pitts introduced H.R. 4257, which would allow Amish youth to work in supervised settings, on July 16, 1998. It passed under suspension on September 28, 1998; however, the Senate did not move on this legislation before the end of the 105th Congress.

106th Congress

Rep. Pitts reintroduced the bill as H.R. 221 on January 6, 1999. The bill passed the House on March 2, 1999, but, again, the Senate did not take action before the close of the 106th Congress.

107th Congress

The legislation was reintroduced on July 25, 2001 as H.R. 2639 in the 107th Congress. It was not reported out of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce Subcommittee on Workforce Protections.

108th Congress

Congressman Pitts and Senator Arlen Specter, reintroduced H.R. 1943 and S. 974, respectively, on May 1, 2003.